

From fish and chips to butter chicken: How India and UK are rediscovering each other's food cultures

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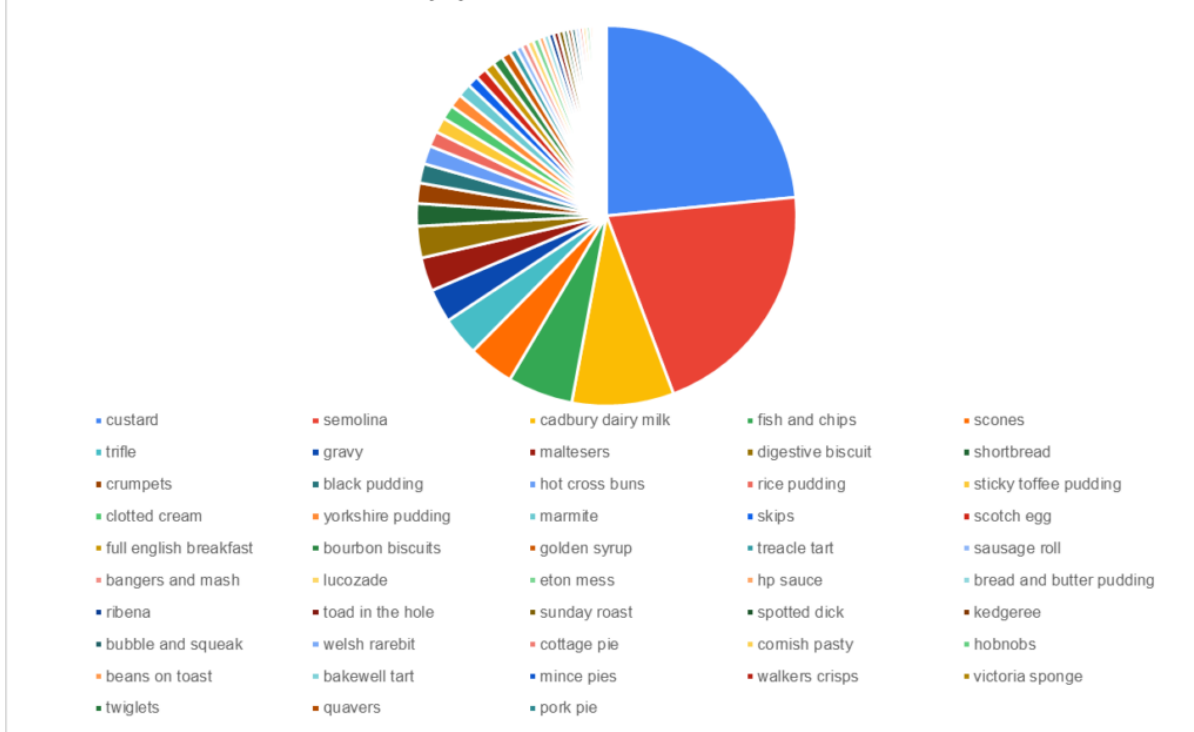


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New research by Cargo Force (<https://www.cargoforce.com/>) reveals a sharp rise in online searches for British foods in India, pointing to a growing cultural openness and evolving taste preferences. At the same time, British consumers continue to show an enduring—and expanding—love for Indian cuisine. Together, these parallel trends signal something deeper than fleeting curiosity: A two-way culinary exchange that reflects globalisation, digital influence, and shifting food identities.

India's Growing Curiosity for British Cuisine

The most popular British foods in India



The data shows that Indian consumers are increasingly exploring British food, with search volumes revealing both nostalgia-driven interest and openness to new flavours.

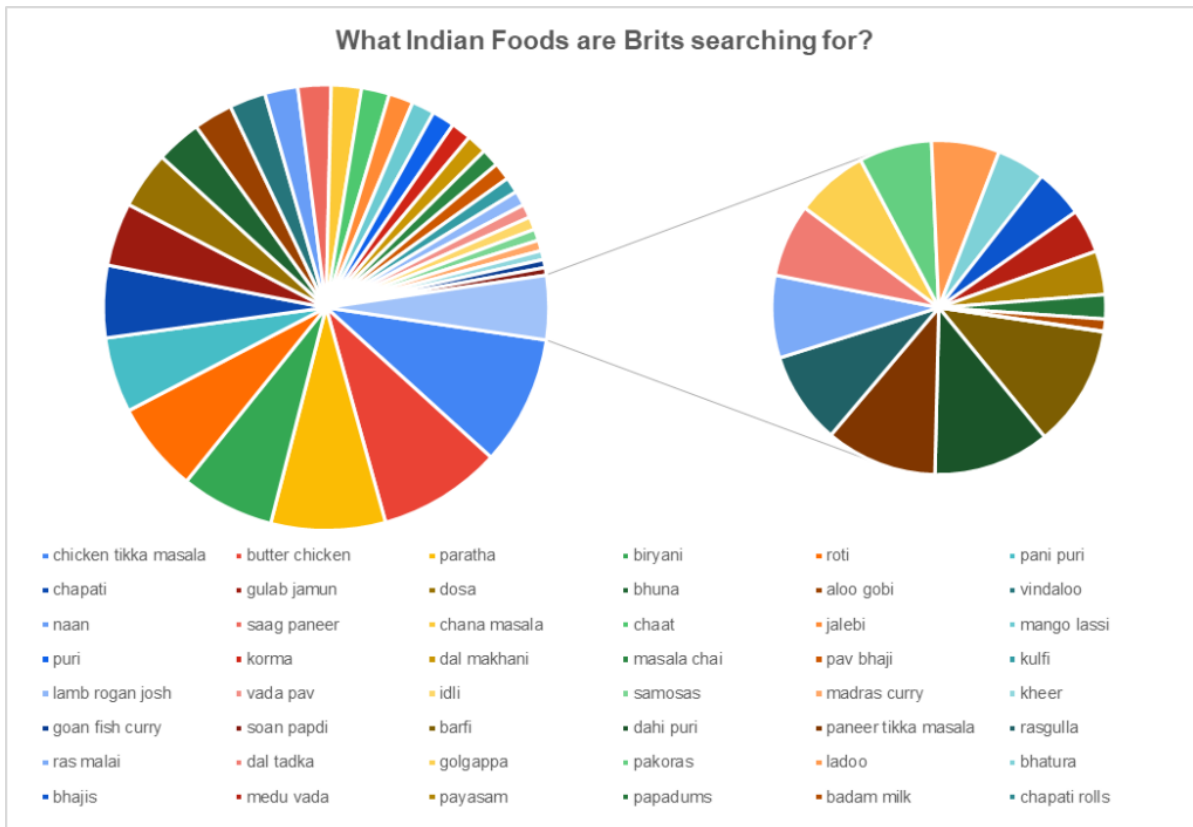
At the top of the list are custard (27,000 monthly searches) and semolina (24,000) – two foods that are not entirely foreign to Indian kitchens. Their popularity suggests familiarity rather than novelty, hinting at shared culinary overlaps shaped by history and adaptation. Custard, for instance, has long been integrated into Indian desserts, while semolina (sooji/rava) is a staple across Indian households.

However, the list quickly expands into distinctly British territory. Cadbury Dairy Milk (10,000), a globally recognised chocolate brand with deep roots in both the UK and India, ranks third, bridging the gap between local consumption and international branding.

Further down, iconic British dishes such as fish and chips (6,400), scones (4,500), and trifle (3,800) point to a growing willingness among Indian consumers to explore traditional UK fare beyond what is already familiar.

Even everyday staples like gravy (3,300), snacks such as Maltesers (3,300), and baked goods including digestive biscuits (3,100) and shortbread (2,200) are drawing attention. Together, these search patterns suggest that Indian consumers are not just dabbling in British cuisine – they are engaging with it across categories, from desserts to main meals to pantry staples.

Sweet Tooth Leads the Way



A closer look at the data reveals a clear trend: sweet and comfort foods dominate Indian searches for British cuisine.

Custard, semolina, Cadbury Dairy Milk, trifle, Maltesers, digestive biscuits, and shortbread collectively account for a large share of interest. This reflects a broader consumer psychology—people tend to explore new cuisines through familiar entry points, and desserts often serve as that gateway.

There is also a strong emotional dimension. Foods like custard and semolina are associated with childhood, home cooking, and comfort. Their popularity suggests that Indian consumers are not merely experimenting with foreign cuisine but are gravitating toward foods that evoke warmth and nostalgia.

This overlap between familiarity and novelty is critical. It lowers the barrier to entry, making British cuisine more approachable and less intimidating.

The Appeal of British Comfort Classics

Beyond sweets, the data shows a steady interest in traditional British comfort foods.

Rank	Food	India Monthly Searches
1	Custard	27,000
2	Semolina	24,000
3	Cadbury Dairy Milk	10,000
4	Fish and Chips	6,400
5	Scones	4,500

Fish and chips, often considered the UK's most iconic dish, is attracting significant attention with 6,400 searches. Its appeal may lie in its simplicity—deep-fried fish paired with potatoes is not far removed from Indian culinary preferences, where fried foods are widely popular.

Similarly, scones and shortbread reflect a growing curiosity about British baking traditions. These items are increasingly featured in cafes and bakeries across urban India, suggesting that offline exposure may be reinforcing online interest.

Meanwhile, the presence of gravy (3,300 searches) indicates interest in the broader structure of British meals. Unlike Indian gravies, which are often rich and spiced, British gravies are typically simpler, meat-based, and used as accompaniments. The curiosity here may stem from a desire to understand these differences and experiment with them at home.

Digital Media as a Culinary Catalyst

One of the most significant drivers behind this trend is the role of digital platforms.

According to Cargo Force's logistics expert Asad Mirza, cultural curiosity is being fuelled by global media, online recipes, and social platforms. Food content—from YouTube tutorials to Instagram reels and cooking blogs—has made it easier than ever for people to discover, learn, and recreate international dishes.

Streaming platforms and television shows also play a role. British baking competitions, cooking shows, and travel documentaries introduce audiences to dishes like scones, trifle, and roast dinners, often sparking interest that translates into online searches.

Importantly, the rise of e-commerce and improved logistics means that ingredients once considered hard to find are now more accessible. This reduces friction between curiosity and action, allowing consumers to move from searching to cooking with relative ease.

A Mirror Trend: Britain's Love Affair with Indian Food

While India is exploring British cuisine, the reverse trend is even more pronounced—and more deeply rooted.

Rank	Food	India Monthly Searches
1	Chicken Tikka Masala	43,000
2	Butter Chicken	41,000
3	Paratha	38,000
4	Biryani	31,000
5	Roti	30,000

Search data from the UK shows overwhelming interest in Indian food, with chicken tikka masala (43,000 searches) and butter chicken (41,000) leading the list by a significant margin. These dishes, rich in flavour and adapted to British tastes over decades, have become staples of the UK's culinary landscape.

But the data goes beyond these well-known favourites. Traditional Indian breads such as paratha (38,000), roti (30,000), and chapati (24,000) are also highly searched, indicating a deeper engagement with Indian cuisine beyond restaurant staples.

Street foods like pani puri (25,000) and regional dishes such as dosa (19,000) suggest that British consumers are increasingly curious about the diversity of Indian food. Even desserts like gulab jamun (21,000) are gaining traction, pointing to a growing appreciation for Indian sweets.

From Colonial Legacy to Culinary Exchange

The relationship between Indian and British cuisines is historically complex, shaped by colonial interactions and migration. However, what is emerging now is less about legacy and more about exchange.

In the UK, Indian food has long been mainstream, supported by a large diaspora and decades of cultural integration. In India, however, British cuisine has not enjoyed the same level of presence—until now.

The current rise in interest suggests a shift. Instead of being perceived as bland or unfamiliar, British food is being rediscovered through a modern lens—one shaped by global media, evolving tastes, and increased exposure.

The Economics of Curiosity

These search trends also have economic implications.

For food brands, restaurants, and retailers, rising curiosity translates into opportunity. British food brands can tap into the Indian market by positioning their products as both novel and accessible. At the same time, Indian brands can leverage the UK's sustained interest in their cuisine to expand offerings and innovate.

Logistics companies like Cargo Force are also likely to benefit, as increased cross-border demand for food products drives the need for efficient supply chains.

Moreover, the growing interest in cooking at home—accelerated by the pandemic—has created a market for ingredients, recipes, and ready-to-cook kits that cater to international cuisines.

What This Means for the Future of Food

The data points to a broader trend: the globalisation of taste is becoming more nuanced.

Consumers are no longer satisfied with surface-level exposure to international cuisines. They are digging deeper—exploring traditional recipes, regional variations, and cultural contexts. This is evident in the UK's interest in items like pani puri and dosa, as well as India's curiosity about dishes like trifle and fish and chips.

At the same time, the blending of cuisines is likely to accelerate. Fusion dishes, cross-cultural adaptations, and hybrid menus are becoming more common, reflecting the interconnected nature of modern food culture.

Conclusion: A Two-Way Culinary Conversation

The rise in searches for British foods in India—and the sustained demand for Indian cuisine in the UK—highlights a two-way culinary conversation that is gaining momentum.

For India, this marks a shift toward greater openness and experimentation, driven by digital access and evolving consumer preferences. For the UK, it reinforces the deep-rooted influence of Indian cuisine while pointing to an appetite for further exploration.

Ultimately, these trends are about more than food. They reflect changing identities, increased cultural exchange, and a world where curiosity travels as fast as data.

In the age of the internet, the journey from “What is trifle?” to “How do I make it?” is just a few clicks away—and that journey is reshaping how cultures connect, one dish at a time.

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